**Town of Princeton**

**Environmental Action Committee (EAC)**

**Meeting Minutes**

**February 13, 2023**

**Meeting called to order** at 7:03 pm

*Committee members present in person:*

Gerry Pellegrini (GP), Kaitlin Kohberger (KK), Steve Jones (SJ), Claire Golding (CG), Corey Burnham Howard (CBH), Forrest Iwanik (FI)

*Committee members present remote*: Matt Charpentier (MC); Phil Gott (PG), arrived late

*Committee members not present*: Phil Gott (PG) (not present for first portion of meeting)

*Student Committee members present:* None

*Advisory Committee liaison present*: Josh Tannenbaum, via remote

Public present: None

No public comment.

CBH explained that PG is attending Complete Streets meeting tonight concerning Worcester Road improvements, as PG and CBH asked the Town Administrator if the Worcester Road project needed any input from EAC. Rain garden suggestions and night-sky-friendly lighting were EAC’s inputs. **Action item**: PG to include a report on this meeting in March updates.

**Old and New Business:**

* Minutes of January 17 were approved with slight amendments. CG motion; FI second; unanimous.
* Minutes of January 19 were approved as written. CG motion; CBH second, unanimous.

**Updates** *(See Compiled Updates, distributed to members before the meeting, at end of this document)*

* **Green Communities?**:
	+ CBH and PG met with Sherry Patch. Sherry received three bids for lighting upgrades at multiple Town facilities. It was expected that Sherry would be awarding the bid to the entity recommended by PG, which also was the entity that included night sky friendly outdoor lighting.
	+ Re: including TPS in Energy Reduction Plan (ERP): Sherry Patch and CBH met with WRSD Superintendent, DOER’s Kelly Brown and Princeton’s CMRPC Green Community administrator Ian to discuss TPS’s inclusion in Princeton’s ERP; Superintendent is open to including TPS in the ERP. Ian was to get information to WRSD but has not responded to Sherry’s inquiries as to whether he has done so. Given WRSD current focus on budget, this issue will be tabled until a more appropriate time to pursue it.
* **Solar Farm Working Group:** The group has recommended to the Selectboard that the Town lease the former landfill land to a solar company for solar energy generation. It is expected aht Town Meeting warrant articles will ask residents to permit the lease of the land for such a use. The feasibility of solar development requires interconnection to transmission lines and the line to Westminster currently has no capacity. PMLD has been pursuing a possible interconnection to Sterling, but the Sterling Municipal Light Department manager has left, so all negotiations with them regarding an interconnection are in limbo for now. The planned solar farm would have 1 MW capacity on the landfill; if the Town swaps land with DCR to expand the site, the land swapped would have to be equally water source protective, and the site could expand to 4 MW. A larger site might be more attractive to a solar developer.
* **Outreach campaign**: Green News Brief topic for March is stormwater management; FI is author. Topics could include catch basin cleaning, home landscaping, etc. **Action item**: FI to send draft by 2/18 to CG. **Action item**: CG to send abbreviated version of PG vehicle efficiency article to RRNews before March 1. Future topics: ***April***: Native Plants & Sustainable Landscaping, to be written by CBH and MC with help from Chris Samoiloff? ***May***: Food and agriculture (FI and Charlie Cary work on this, with help from MC?). ***June***: Invasive Plants & Insects, to be written by KK and MC.
* **Rain barrel program**: EAC is looking to facilitate resident purchase of rain barrels. EAC needs to reach out to Sherry Patch and see if we can use a site for rain barrel storage/pickup. Possible collection places include Wachusett Meadow, TPS. **Action item**: FI to contact Great American Rain Barrel Co. (GARB) to find out if there is a minimum number of barrels that must be ordered; will also contact Worcester colleagues to find out if Princeton could partner with Worcester GARB effort. Consider coordinating with Wachusett Garden Club; contact them to promote? Decide: Use March Speaker Series event to explain rain barrel program?
* **PMLD**: Commissioners meet 2/14, so no updates.
* **Member recruitment**: We still need one more member.
* **Master Plan Steering Committee**: One chapter of the Master Plan has come in to Steering Committee members; 2 more are still to come. **Action item**: CG to share chapters with EAC when they are available, but EAC members must not share with others. Comments and suggestions on environmental topics within the chapters are welcome.
* **Ecotourism grant**: No action on this yet because of unfinished Master Plan work by CMRPC.

Note: GP volunteered to take minutes of April meeting, when CG will be away.

Agenda for next meeting, Monday, 3/13/23:

* Public Comment Period
* Approval of minutes of 2/13/23
* Updates, including Worcester Road Complete Streets report
* New business
* Agenda items for next meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Claire Golding

**EAC Working Group Updates for Review and Discussion at EAC February Meeting:**

**Green Communities Initiative Update (CBH) (PG)**

There has been no update from CMRCP Representative Ian who was tasked with getting information to WRSD prior to mid-January meetings—with regard to WRSD adoption of Princeton’s Energy Reduction Plan and Fuel Efficient Vehicle Policy—so that Princeton might add TPS to its ERP and better attract vendors for energy upgrades.

Sherry Patch has received three bids for lighting upgrades at multiple Town facilities. PG analyzed bids and made suggested recommendation of vendor based on economic, energy saving, and environmental analysis. At the EAC’s request, an updated RFP did request night sky friendly outdoor lighting, and the vendor that PG recommends specified utilizing night sky friendly outdoor lighting in outdoor lighting upgrades. The cost of these upgrades would be paid through already approved Green Community Designation Grant funds.

**Snow & Ice Policy (CBH)**

*No new updates.*

**Climate Resiliency Outreach Campaign (CBH)**

 *(See Communications updates below.)*

**MVP (PG)**

*No new updates.*

**PFAS Information Sharing (FI)**

*No new updates.*

**Communications/Newsletter/Website (CG) (CBH)**

- ***February Green News Brief*** by PG on saving energy during vehicle use has been drafted by PG and is being edited by CG. It should be issued soon and likely before our 2/13 meeting. EAC to consider if article is submitted to RRNews for possible publication in RRNews March issue.

- PG to speak on 2/23 regarding vehicle energy savings—as part of EAC Speaker Series/Climate Resiliency Outreach Campaign.

- CBH will be getting $30 gift card “thank you” (in lieu of any speaker fee) gift certificate from Montis for Sean McKeon for February presentation.

- ***March Green News*** ***Brief*** topic is: “Stormwater management” - Subtopics: flooding risks; catch basin cleaning; landscape options. FI and CC signed up to lead. Since CC resigned, there is an opportunity for another EAC member volunteer to work with FI. Typically goal has been to complete draft by 15th of prior month to allow time for edits and finalization and publication.

- March- in-person event: preliminary plans were for a potential Rain Barrel sale lead by FI and CG.

- Still need to make website corrections/updates. CBH reached out to new Town Clerk who said she’d train CBH as to how to make changes to pages once she is settled into her new position.

**EAC Liaison Updates:**

**Public Safety Building Committee (PG)**

*No new updates.*

**Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) update** **(CG)**

- One chapter (Economic Development) in from CMRPC; CG will share if anyone on EAC is interested in reading/commenting at this point. Other chapters coming in later this week (2/10) or next week (week of 2/13).

**Waste and Recycling Committee Update (CG)**

- Transfer Station: WRC is meeting with DEP and BoH 2/15 to discuss siting process, obstacles to desired site. Survey is closed; we got over 300 responses. Interest level in using transfer station is about 140 households (46% of respondents; just under 10% of total households in town—but many households did not complete the survey).

**Princeton Solar Farm Working Group (CBH)**

- The group’s Interim Report to the Selectboard was delivered. (See copy of report Attachment A.)

- The group attended the Selectboard’s 2/8 meeting and answered some questions. It appeared the Selectboard were taking the recommendations under advisement and would consider next steps.

**Earth Month Working Group (CG) (CBH)**

Committee will be meeting 2/17 for 2023 planning. Other EAC members welcome to join CBH and CG on this working group (can have one more without creating a quorum of EAC members). If we continue, we will need someone with database expertise to replace Rick Gardner, who probably won’t do it forever… Will be publicizing in March RRNews.

**Open Space Committee (GP)**

*No new updates.*

**PMLD (PG)**

*No new updates.*

*ATTACHMENT A:*

 **TOWN OF PRINCETON**

 **Solar Farm Working Group**

December 19, 2022

**Interim Report to Selectboard on**

**Potential Solar Energy System Installation**

**at the Closed Town Landfill**

On March 22, 2022, the Selectboard authorized the formation of the Solar Farm Working Group to research the project specifics and guidelines in preparation of a potential Request For Proposals for installation of a solar energy electricity generation facility at the site of the closed Town landfill on Hubbardston Road. After months of research, public meetings, and discussion, the Solar Farm Working Group now offers this interim report and provides the following findings and recommendations:

**Background and Findings**

***Location***

The site of the closed Town landfill off of Hubbardston Road (the “Property”) is an ideal location for the siting and operation of a large-scale solar energy system. Owned by the Town,[[1]](#footnote-1) the property is accessed by a permanent easement,[[2]](#footnote-2) zoned Business-Industrial,[[3]](#footnote-3) surrounded by protected open space land,[[4]](#footnote-4) with few distant neighbor residences, screened from the public way by existing mature vegetation, and within reasonable proximity to a three-phased distribution line.[[5]](#footnote-5)

***Feasibility of Proposed Use***

According to state records, the landfill was closed and partially capped in 1984.[[6]](#footnote-6) An initial review reveals that the landfill on the Property has been properly closed and all monitoring and maintenance requirements are in compliance with state regulations and are up to date.[[7]](#footnote-7) Massachusetts “encourages the ‘recycling’ of old landfills into renewable energy facilities”.[[8]](#footnote-8) Solar panels can be placed on a closed landfill without penetrating the site’s land surface. To date, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (“MassDEP”) has approved more than 100 renewable energy projects on closed and capped landfills, including, among many others, solar arrays at the Acton Landfill; the Ayer Sanitary Landfill; the Brookfield Landfill; the Concord Landfill; the Groton Landfill; the Hudson-Stow Landfill; the Lancaster Landfill; the Maynard Landfill; the Shirley Landfill; the Warren South Street Landfill; and the Winchendon Landfill.[[9]](#footnote-9)

At approximately 9 acres in size, the Property could host a solar photovoltaic system installation of approximately one megawatt (1 MWDc) of electric capacity.

A possibility of expanding the size and electricity generating capacity of a solar energy system from the Property may exist through use of a portion of the adjacent land currently owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Water Supply Protection (“DCRW”). A portion of this adjacent DCRW-owned property was formerly used as a sand pit and currently is open space land owned by DCRW,[[10]](#footnote-10) protected and managed for water quality protection and subject to Article 97 land disposition requirements.[[11]](#footnote-11) The possible use of approximately 15 acres of this former sandpit-adjacent land for expanded solar energy electricity generation would allow for the hosting of approximately three additional megawatts (3 MWDc) of solar electric capacity. Use of that land would require, among other things, the approval by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (“EOEA”) of the swap of real estate of equal or greater fair market value or value in use of proposed use, whichever is greater, and significantly greater resource value (i.e., drinking water quality protection). This adjacent DCRW-owned land is similarly screened from the public way by mature vegetation.

**Recommendations**

At this time, the Solar Farm Working Group recommends that the Town pursue lease of the Property to a solar energy system developer/operator for electricity generation, while also considering and researching the possibility of securing the adjoining DCRW-owned former sandpit land for potential solar electrical energy generation capacity expansion.

The **benefits** of the lease of the Property for such a use include:

* leveraging this otherwise unusable asset to generate new revenue, including through the lease and possibly a payment in lieu of taxes (“PILOT”) agreement[[12]](#footnote-12);
* gaining climate resiliency by encouraging local renewable energy production and reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
* providing an opportunity for Princeton Municipal Light Department (“PMLD”) to meet its legal requirement of purchasing 50% of its power from “non-carbon emitting” sources by 2030 and 100% of its power from such sources by 2050.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Major tasks involved in developing solar projects include site feasibility assessment—which, here, likely includes improvements to the access road to the Property; environmental permitting; conceptual design; energy and attribute offtake agreements (e.g., Solar Renewable Energy Certificates); permitting and interconnection applications; engineering; equipment procuring; project financing; construction; interconnection; and long-term system operations and maintenance. Given the small size of our Town, the limited number of Town staff that could lead this project, limited Town staff expertise in such projects, and the demand for Town funds and personnel in other critical areas, the Solar Farm Working Group recommends that the Town pursue this solar project through a long-term lease that will shift the majority of the **risk, responsibility and costs** from the Town to the project developer/owner. The benefit to a vendor in taking on these risks and costs includes revenues from the sale of electricity, Solar Renewable Energy Certificate (“SREC”) revenues,[[14]](#footnote-14) federal tax incentives[[15]](#footnote-15) and various state program incentives.

In order to procure a lease agreement for a solar energy electricity generating use on the Property, the Town will need to:

1. Confirm with PMLD the future availability of electric grid transmission capacity and the feasibility of a solar energy generation facility to connect and transmit electricity onto the electric grid.[[16]](#footnote-16)
2. Obtain Town Meeting approval to use the Property for a solar project, to issue a Request for Proposals (“RFP”) from qualified solar energy developers, and to authorize the Selectboard and/or Town Administrator to choose the third party to which to award the landfill solar project and to negotiate the lease and project contract.[[17]](#footnote-17)
3. Issue an RFP from qualified solar energy developers to design, engineer, install, own, operate and maintain a solar photovoltaic energy system and associated infrastructure at an approximate 9-acre parcel of Town-owned land, which was formerly used as the Town landfill, off of Hubbardston Road to be leased by the solar energy developer from the Town.

The RFP should be drafted in consultation with an attorney experienced in RFPs for solar installations on municipal landfills. Among other things, the RFP should clearly: articulate project details, goals, timeframes and expectations; provide that the vendor is responsible for all aspects of project development, assumes all risks, and all costs including for feasibility assessments, post-closure use permitting, environmental permitting, design and engineering, financing, construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning; address the methodology by which proposal prices/revenues will be evaluated; time of performance and liquidated damages provisions; and more.[[18]](#footnote-18) The RFP would also address negotiation of the lease period and the value of the land lease.

1. Evaluate the RFPs and negotiate and enter into the lease.

As the Selectboard considers these recommendations, the Solar Farm Working Group is available to respond to related inquiries and requests.

Sincerely,

The Solar Farm Working Group

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Richard Chase, Chair

 On behalf of Members: Richy Bisk; Corey Burnham-Howard; Jennifer Greene; Larry Greene; Bonnie Hirsh; Brian Keevan; Terri Longtine; John Mirick; Sherry Patch; Helen Townsend; Victoria Taft, Helga Lyons

1. See Princeton Property Map No. 11, Lots 11-1-2, 11-1-3, and 11-1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Taking Order; Worcester District Registry of Deeds Document # 26048, Book 10912, Page 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Princeton Zoning Map. The Business-Industrial zone allows for as-of-right siting of a renewable energy facility. The Planning Board is drafting a Solar Energy Systems by-law, which is expected to be presented at Town Meeting in May 2023. The current version of the draft would allow large scale solar energy systems in any zoning district, with a special permit required in the Residential-Agricultural District and the Business District, and subject to certain specified conditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Property is surrounded by land owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Water Supply (“DCRW”) Protection. See DCR Stewardship Map. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This area of Hubbardston Road is supported by an upgraded 13.8 KV portion of the Princeton Municipal Light Department (“PMLD”) electric distribution system. Although interconnection from a solar installation on the Property will require a solar energy system developer to upgrade approximately one mile of transmission lines from one-phase to three-phase lines, such proximity to a three-phased distribution line makes interconnection of a solar energy system to the electric grid more cost-effective than if a greater distance of upgrades was needed. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs “Inactive or Closed Solid Waste Landfills in Massachusetts” (April 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. R. Chase communication with James McQuade at Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection on March 2, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection “Siting Clean Energy at Closed Landfills”. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See List of Massachusetts Closed Landfills with Permits for Renewable Energy providing list of town names, energy facility size, and link to Post Closure Use Permit for each. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See DCR Stewardship Map. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Massachusetts Constitution Article of Amendment XCVII  and Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Article 97 Land Disposition Policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Under M.G.L. c. 59, sec. 38H(b), a municipality may enter into a PILOT agreement with an electric “generation company” or “wholesale generation company” to replace taxes on the value of the company’s generating facilities in the community. See also M.G.L. c. 59, sec. 5, cl. 45, which has been interpreted by the Appellate Tax Board as exempting both residential and commercial solar arrays from property taxes. See also Office of the State Auditor, Division of Local Mandates, “The Impact of State-Owned Land PILOT and Solar Taxation Polices on Municipalities—Situational Analysis: Solar Facility PILOTS (M.G.L. c. 59, sec. 38H(b).” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See “An Act Creating a Next Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “State Solar Renewable Energy Certificate Markets.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, “Guide to the Federal Investment Tax Credit for Commercial Solar Photovoltaics” (January 2021) and “Solar Investment Tax Credit: What Changed?” (September 8, 2022). See also Environmental and Energy Study Institute, “Clean Energy Tax Credits Get a Boost in New Climate Law” (September 9, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. At this time, there is no infrastructure capacity for electricity from a solar energy generation facility to flow onto the grid that interconnects to the Westminster substation. PMLD is working toward a planned interconnect to Sterling by spring 2023; this interconnect would have capacity to accept solar energy facility generated electricity. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See M.G.L. c. 40 and M.G.L. c. 30B, sec. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Upon request, the Solar Farm Working Group can provide to the Selectboard/Town Administrator a list of links to various RFPs issued by Massachusetts municipalities for solar energy development on municipal landfills. See also, “The Guide to Developing Solar Photovoltaics at Massachusetts Landfills , Module #7: How Do We Manage the Procurement Process?”

Which procurement process to be used (e.g., M.G.L. c. 30B, sec. 16; c. 25A; c. 149A; or c. 164, sec. 143(d)) will depend on the parameters of ownership and operation and must be selected carefully in consultation with legal counsel. Chapter 30B, Section 16,would apply if the Property is leased to a third party that will be installing, owning and operating a solar energy system on the Town-owned property. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)